

The Church and Humanism.

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Himself, than these studies, which not only lead to the ornament and guidance of human life, but are applicable and useful to any particular situation—in adversity consolatory, in prosperity pleasing and honourable—insomuch that without them we should be deprived of all the grace of life and all the polish of social intercourse." Leo was, in fact, more humanist than pope, though officially he managed to reconcile the new culture with the traditional authority which he wielded. The spirit of the Medici reigned supreme in the curia. Even the papacy, though it was to veer back in Leo's successors of the latter half of the sixteenth century to the mediaeval spirit, could not henceforth afford to ignore the changed spirit of the times. Nor could it prevent by counter-reformation devices the inevitable breach in the Church which humanism helped to bring about. It might burn Savonarola, who demanded a sweeping reform in the teeth of the opposition of the curia, under the infamous Alexander's auspices. It might damn Luther and all his works, and look askance at Erasmus and Reuchlin. Thomas Aquinas might remain the arbiter of sound doctrine, and the Council of Trent give renewed expression to mediaeval tradition as the creed of the Church, but the humanists had succeeded in creating a new age in culture; and in other lands, if not in Italy, the Church was ere long to discover that they had at the same time conjured a revolution.

The Italian humanists were for the most part scholars and men of letters. They were devotees of the classics, not original thinkers. A few, like Ficino and Mirandola, were philosophers as well as scholars, and devoted themselves to the task of expounding the Platonic philosophy and harmonising it with Christianity. They were also, what was only too rare in this age of reaction and transition, men of pure life and soaring purpose. But Ficino was no creative genius, and the prodigy Mirandola died too early to do justice to his great powers. There was one exception to the rule of intellectual mediocrity. It is that of Machiavelli, who, as we shall see in the following chapter, was a truly original genius, and struck out on a new path of inquiry. It was not in what these men did in the way of constructing a new philosophy; it was in the work they did in helping to emancipate the